

LEE LITIGATION GROUP, PLLC
C.K. Lee (320249)
30 East 39th Street, Second Floor
New York, NY 10016
Tel.: 212-465-1188
Fax: 212-465-1181
Attorney for Plaintiff and the Class

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
EASTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA**

DAVID DICARLO,
on behalf of himself and all others similarly situated,

Case No.:

Plaintiff,

CLASS ACTION COMPLAINT

-against-

CASMOS CAFE', INC.
d/b/a THE COUCH TOMATO,

Defendant.

Plaintiff, DAVID DICARLO (hereinafter "Plaintiff"), on behalf of himself and all others similarly situated, by and through his undersigned attorney, hereby files this Class Action Complaint against Defendant, CASMOS CAFE', INC. d/b/a THE COUCH TOMATO (hereinafter "Defendant"), and states as follows:

INTRODUCTION

1. This class action seeks to put an end to systemic civil rights violations committed by Defendant against the blind in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and across the United States. Defendant is denying blind individuals throughout the United States equal access to the goods and services Defendant provides to its non-disabled customers through <https://www.thecouchtomato.com> (hereinafter the "Website"). The Website provides to the public a wide array of the goods, services, and other programs offered by Defendant. Yet, the

Website contains access barriers that make it difficult, if not impossible, for blind customers to use the Website. Defendant thus excludes the blind from the full and equal participation in the growing Internet economy that is increasingly a fundamental part of the common marketplace and daily living. In the wave of technological advances in recent years, assistive computer technology is becoming an increasingly prominent part of everyday life, allowing blind people to fully and independently access a variety of services, including browsing menus and finding locations online.

2. Plaintiff is a blind individual. He brings this civil rights class action against Defendant for failing to design, construct, and/or own or operate a website that is fully accessible to, and independently usable by, blind people.

3. Specifically, the Website has many access barriers preventing blind people from independently navigating using assistive computer technology.

4. Plaintiff uses the terms “blind person” or “blind people” and “the blind” to refer to all persons with visual impairments who meet the legal definition of blindness in that they have a visual acuity with correction of less than or equal to 20/200. Some blind people who meet this definition have limited vision. Others have no vision.

5. Approximately 8.1 million people in the United States are visually impaired, including 2.0 million who are blind.¹ There are nearly 300,000 visually impaired persons in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.²

6. Many blind people enjoy using the Internet just as sighted people do. The lack of an accessible website means that blind people are excluded from the rapidly expanding self-

¹ Americans with Disabilities: 2010 Report, U.S. Census Bureau Reports

²“Pennsylvania,” *American Foundation for the Blind*, last modified January 2017, <http://www.afb.org/info/blindness-statistics/state-specific-statistical-information/pennsylvania/235>.

service food industry and from independently accessing the Website.

7. Despite readily available accessible technology, such as the technology in use at other heavily trafficked websites, which makes use of alternative text, accessible forms, descriptive links, and resizable text, and limits the usage of tables and JavaScript, Defendant has chosen to rely on an exclusively visual interface. Defendant's sighted customers can independently browse, select, and find Defendant's locations without the assistance of others. However, blind people must rely on sighted companions to assist them in browsing Defendant's locations on the Website.

8. By failing to make the Website accessible to blind persons, Defendant is violating basic equal access requirements under federal law.

9. Congress provided a clear and national mandate for the elimination of discrimination against individuals with disabilities when it enacted the Americans with Disabilities Act. Such discrimination includes barriers to full integration, independent living, and equal opportunity for persons with disabilities, including those barriers created by websites and other public accommodations that are inaccessible to blind and visually impaired persons.

10. Plaintiff intended to browse Defendant's locations on the Website, but was unable to successfully do so due to accessibility barriers. Unless Defendant remedies the numerous access barriers on the Website, Plaintiff and Class members will continue to be unable to independently navigate, browse, and use the Website.

11. This complaint seeks declaratory and injunctive relief to correct Defendant's policies and practices to include measures necessary to ensure compliance with federal law, to include monitoring of such measures, and to update and remove accessibility barriers on the Website so that Plaintiff and the proposed Class and Subclass of customers who are blind will be

able to independently and privately use the Website. This complaint also seeks compensatory damages to compensate Class members for having been subjected to unlawful discrimination.

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

12. This Court has subject matter jurisdiction of this action pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1331 and 42 U.S.C. § 12188, for Plaintiff's claims arising under Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act, 42 U.S.C. § 12181, *et seq.*, ("ADA").

13. Venue is proper in the Eastern District of Pennsylvania pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1391(b)-(c) and 1441(a). Defendant is subject to personal jurisdiction in the Eastern District of Pennsylvania based on the principle place of business of Defendant. Defendant is registered to do business in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and has been doing business in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The restaurant locations are owned by Defendant and are located in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Defendant also has been and is committing the acts alleged herein in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, has been and is violating the rights of consumers in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and has been and is causing injury to consumers in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

PARTIES

14. Plaintiff is and has been at all times material hereto a resident of New York, New York.

15. Plaintiff is legally blind and a member of a protected class under the ADA, 42 U.S.C. § 12102(1)-(2) and the regulations implementing the ADA set forth at 28 CFR §§ 36.101 *et seq.* Plaintiff cannot use a computer without the assistance of screen reading software. Plaintiff has been denied the full enjoyment of the facilities, goods, and services of the Website, as a result of accessibility barriers on the Website. Most recently in January 2018, Plaintiff attempted to

browse Defendant's locations on the Website, but could not do so due to the inaccessibility of the Website. The inaccessibility of the Website has deterred him and Class members from enjoying the goods and services of Defendant.

16. Defendant is an American for-profit corporation organized under the laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and has a principal executive office located at 102 Rector Street, Philadelphia, PA 19127. Defendant has two locations: (i) Manayunk, PA, and (ii) West Chester in Philadelphia, PA.

17. Defendant owns and operates the Couch Tomato (hereinafter the "Restaurant"), which are places of public accommodation located in Pennsylvania. The Restaurant provides to the public important goods, such as soups, sandwiches, and pizza. Among other things, the Website provides access to the array of goods and services offered to the public by Defendant. The inaccessibility of the Website has deterred Plaintiff from browsing locations online.

18. Plaintiff, on behalf of himself and others similarly situated, seeks full and equal access to the services provided by Defendant through the Website.

CLASS ACTION ALLEGATIONS

19. Plaintiff, on behalf of himself and all others similarly situated, seeks certification of the following nationwide class pursuant to Rule 23(a) and 23(b)(2) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure: "all legally blind individuals in the United States who have attempted to access the Website and as a result have been denied access to the enjoyment of goods and services offered by Defendant, during the relevant statutory period."

20. Plaintiff seeks certification of the following Pennsylvania subclass pursuant to Fed.R.Civ.P. 23(a), 23(b)(2), and, alternatively, 23(b)(3): "all legally blind individuals in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania who have attempted to access the Website and as a result have

been denied access to the enjoyment of goods and services offered by Defendant, during the relevant statutory period.”

21. There are hundreds of thousands of visually impaired persons in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. There are approximately 8.1 million people in the United States who are visually impaired. Thus, the persons in the class are so numerous that joinder of all such persons is impractical and the disposition of their claims in a class action is a benefit to the parties and to the Court.

22. This case arises out of Defendant’s policy and practice of maintaining an inaccessible website that denies blind persons access to the goods and services of the Website and the Restaurant. Due to Defendant’s policy and practice of failing to remove access barriers, blind persons have been and are being denied full and equal access to independently browse the Website and by extension the goods and services offered through the Website by the Restaurant.

23. There are common questions of law and fact common to the class, including without limitation, the following:

- (a) Whether the Website is a “public accommodation” under the ADA; and
- (b) Whether Defendant through the Website denies the full and equal enjoyment of its goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations to people with visual disabilities in violation of the ADA.

24. The claims of the named Plaintiff are typical of those of the class. The class, similarly to the Plaintiff, are severely visually impaired or otherwise blind, and claim that Defendant has violated the ADA by failing to update or remove access barriers on the Website, so it can be independently accessible to the class of people who are legally blind.

25. Plaintiff will fairly and adequately represent and protect the interests of the members of the Class because Plaintiff has retained and is represented by counsel competent and experienced in complex class action litigation, and because Plaintiff has no interests antagonistic to the members of the class. Class certification of the claims is appropriate pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(b)(2) because Defendant has acted or refused to act on grounds generally applicable to the Class, making appropriate both declaratory and injunctive relief with respect to Plaintiff and the Class as a whole.

26. Alternatively, class certification is appropriate under Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(b)(3) because questions of law and fact common to Class members clearly predominate over questions affecting only individual class members, and because a class action is superior to other available methods for the fair and efficient adjudication of this litigation.

27. Judicial economy will be served by maintenance of this lawsuit as a class action in that it is likely to avoid the burden that would be otherwise placed upon the judicial system by the filing of numerous similar suits by people with visual disabilities throughout the United States.

28. References to Plaintiff shall be deemed to include the named Plaintiff and each member of the class, unless otherwise indicated.

FACTUAL ALLEGATIONS

29. Defendant operates the Restaurant, an American restaurant offering soups, sandwiches, and pizza. The Restaurant is located at the following locations:

- (a) 102 Rector Street, Philadelphia, PA 19127; and
- (b) 31 West Gay Street, West Chester, PA 19380.

30. The Website is a service and benefit offered by Defendant throughout the United States, including the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The Website is owned, controlled and/or operated by Defendant.

31. Among the features offered by the Website are the following:

- (a) information about the Restaurant, allowing persons who wish to dine at the Restaurant to learn its locations, hours, and phone numbers;
- (b) a menu;
- (c) the ability to order online;
- (d) the ability to purchase gift cards; and
- (e) information about the Restaurant and its rewards program.

32. This case arises out of Defendant's policy and practice of denying the blind access to the Website, including the goods and services offered by Defendant through the Website. Due to Defendant's failure and refusal to remove access barriers to the Website, blind individuals have been and are being denied equal access to the Restaurant, as well as to the numerous goods, services and benefits offered to the public through the Website.

33. Defendant denies the blind access to goods, services and information made available through the Website by preventing them from freely navigating the Website.

34. The Internet has become a significant source of information for conducting business and for doing everyday activities such as shopping, banking, etc., for sighted and blind persons.

35. The blind access websites by using keyboards in conjunction with screen reading software which vocalizes visual information on a computer screen. Except for a blind person whose residual vision is still sufficient to use magnification, screen reading software provides the only method by which a blind person can independently access the Internet. Unless websites are